



## **In Commemoration of International Human Rights Day, HRCSL Discusses Human Rights and Elections ahead of the 2023 Elections**

The commemoration of International Human Rights Day by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) climaxed with a panel discussion on the local theme “Human Rights and Elections.” The theme was coined in view of the forthcoming elections in Sierra Leone on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2023.



The panel included the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), Civil Society Organisation, the Media (SLAJ), Women, Youth, and Persons with Disability. The topics discussed were; the role of Elections Management Bodies (EMBs) in ensuring Peaceful and Credible Elections and the Participation of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disability in Elections.



According to Ibrahim Tommy, Executive Director of Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL), electoral processes must be peaceful and collaborative. He added that violence occurs in disagreement or lack of trust or participation. He noted that Elections Management Bodies especially the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) and Political Parties Regulatory Commission (PPRC) should maintain electoral dispute resolution mechanisms where they can constantly dialogue with key players in the process – the political parties. Mr. Tommy said other organs of the state like the SLP, the Judiciary, and the Media should provide support to ECSL and PPRC to ensure a peaceful, free and fair process.



While the audience called on the SLP to resist brutality and ensure effective security management during the elections, the Head of Media, Assistant Commissioner of Police Brima Kamara noted that the SLP has been effective in its mandate and impartial but urged Sierra Leoneans to abide by the Rule of Law.

The participation of women, youth, and persons with disability in elections was emphasized by panelists and the audience. Salieu Turay, Vice-President of the Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues (SLUDI) said, the location of some polling centres, lack of aiding materials for persons with disability, and not providing space in political parties for persons with disability to contest for positions are major barriers to full participation in electoral processes.

The National President of the National Youth Council Tejan Z. Kella called on youths to resist incentives from politicians that will lure them to participate in any form of violence. He said youths should be thinking of positive



participation in politics by contesting for positions within their political parties or national leadership. He noted that in as much as people should enjoy their human rights, that should go with responsibility.



Aminata Kelly-Lamin Advocacy Manager of Action Aid Sierra Leone applauded the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) Act 2022 which will increase the number of women in political positions. She however noted that although the GEWE came in handy, some women are disappointed that the Act states that ‘in the distribution of symbols after every two men then one woman’ even when women constitute 52% of the country’s population –“this is not equity”, she added.

In a resounding statement by the Chairperson of HRCSL, Madam Patricia Narsu Ndanema she strongly called on everyone to observe, respect, and defend



human rights not only on December 10<sup>th</sup> marking the International Human Rights Day but throughout the conduct of the 2023 electoral processes. She added that “as Sierra Leone prepares for the multitier elections, we must have in mind that electoral processes are expressions of people’s political will. This simply means that the right to express diverse ideas must be firmly guarded during election periods as guaranteed in Article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Sierra Leone is a state party. It is however worth adding that while we enjoy this right, it must be done within the confines of the law. “

The Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Mohamed Lamin Tarawalley Esq. in his keynote statement said, previous speakers, deliberated on challenges towards violence during elections. He said the government is aware of the fact that promoting prerequisite rights is to ensure peaceful elections are maintained within the law, adding that diatribes and messages sent on social media are geared towards fueling violence during elections. “As a government, it is our duty to ensure peace, law, and order at all times as guaranteed in the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991”, he said.





He reaffirmed the government's commitment to the peaceful conduct of elections, and that no one shall be deprived unnecessarily of their prerequisite right and called on all Sierra Leoneans to be law-abiding to avoid another August 10 scenario.

He commended the Commission for strides made in the protection and promotion of human rights in the country, and for maintaining its Grade 'A' Status.

